

**U.S. COAST GUARD
MARINE SAFETY OFFICE PORTLAND, MAINE**

SAFETY ALERT

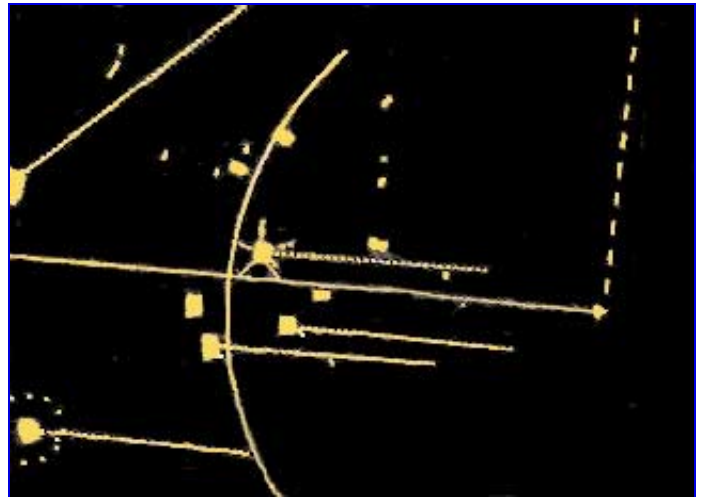
Small Vessel Collision Avoidance Advisory

Operators of large commercial vessels are advised that changes in fisheries patterns have significantly affected fishing vessel operating practices in the Gulf of Maine. These changes may have resulted in a higher risk of collision between transportation vessels and commercial fishing vessels in Gulf of Maine waters. This alert is intended to advise ship operators of some of the more significant changes affecting commercial fishing operations in waters beyond 3 nautical miles from land.

Large tracts of waters in the vicinity of the Great South Channel and Georges Banks have been closed to commercial fishing operations. Vessels traditionally fishing these waters have been displaced, with many moving into the Gulf of Maine. Additionally, periodic closures of near coastal waters (within 20 NM of land) along the coast of Maine have disrupted traditional concentrations of smaller vessels.

Although fishing vessels can be encountered at any time through out the Gulf of Maine, recent changes in fishing patterns may result in increased presence of smaller vessels in offshore waters. These vessels will typically be less than 12 meters in length, of fiberglass construction, with minimal topside structure. Most of these vessels will be employed in stationary gear fisheries and will not be fitted with masts, gallows framing, or trawling gear. These vessels may have poor radar signatures, especially when compared to larger mobile gear fishing vessels likely to be encountered further offshore.

The lobster fishery in Maine has experienced a significant recapitalization of the fleet in recent years. Vessels of recent construction are more durable and are expected to pursue this fishery into marginal winter weather conditions. Increased presence of lobster vessels during the months of December through May is anticipated. These vessels will operate individually in waters extended to 20 NM from land (and beyond) along the entire coast of the Gulf of Maine. These vessels will typically fish during daylight hours, although they may transit after dark. The presence of stationary fishing gear in the water indicates areas actively being fished.



This ARPA image from a westbound ship near Monhegan Island shows a dense fleet of fishing vessels ahead. The decision to sail into a fishing fleet, and the resulting complexity of collision avoidance when surrounded by small boats, was a factor in a 1996 fatal collision.

The bluefin tuna fishery extends from late June through early October. This fishery is closed sporadically throughout the season, resulting in great fluctuation of the number of vessels that may be encountered in offshore waters on any given day. A wide variety of vessels will participate in this fishery, including small open boats, some as small as 6-7 meters in length. Vessels in this fishery will anchor or drift over coastal banks, and frequently will congregate in fleets near productive fishing areas.

Ocean going vessel operators are strongly encouraged to remain vigilant at all times when operating in the vicinity of fishing vessels or when stationary gear is sighted in the water. At least 4 significant collisions have occurred within the Gulf of Maine in recent years, claiming 3 lives. Please do your part to help prevent similar collisions.

For further information on this Safety Alert contact:

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